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ABSTRACT

The State of Mississippi authorized the construction of additions to three of the state's academic libraries. At the University of Southern Mississippi, planning for an addition raised the question of assignable study space. Lockable individual study rooms (carrels) and group study rooms were planned, and questions of how to assign them and rules for their use arose. A survey of 52 public academic libraries examined their assignable study space policies to aid in writing a policy for the University's Cook Memorial Library. Nearly every response indicated that the number of carrels available was not sufficient to meet the requests for assignment. Although demand was great, many libraries indicated that actual use was low, with carrels frequently unoccupied. A majority of carrels were assigned to faculty, and most policies provided an academic year or calendar year assignment. Carrels were usually assigned on a first-come, first-served basis, with library personnel making the assignment. Policies for group study rooms were most often based on the staffing available to enforce the policies established. It will be necessary to post regulations for use of carrels and group study rooms and to make all policies clear to potential users. (SLD)

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ED 389 304

CREATING POLICIES FOR ASSIGNABLE STUDY SPACE IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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CREATING POLICIES FOR ASSIGNABLE STUDY SPACE

IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

ABSTRACT: Planning for new services during facility expansion in an academic library is characteristically an opportunity to update old policies and establish new ones. Lockable, individual study rooms (carrels) and group study rooms were planned and the establishment of assignable study space revealed a number of issues to address: Who uses the space? For how long? How is it accessible? A request was made of over fifty academic libraries to obtain assignable study space policies in order to write the Cook Memorial Library policy. From the policies obtained, a menu of options was created. The policy menu and comments from the respondents served as a guideline for creating a policy on the use of assignable study space.

Introduction:

In one of the more enjoyable tasks academic libraries encounter, the State of Mississippi authorized funding through a state bond issue to construct additions to three of the State's academic libraries. The University of Southern Mississippi received $13.5 million dollars for renovation of and an addition to Cook Memorial Library. The last addition to the Cook Library facility was completed in 1966, and space for library functions became inadequate as enrollment steadily increased.

The program document for construction/renovation outlined needs for collections, processes, staff and users. As space demands exceeded the funding required, it was apparent that every need would not be fully met. There was demand from the faculty and students to provide adequate seating and assignable study space in the form of research carrels and group study spaces in the project, which the former library facility did not have. The final building plans called for eighty (6' X 8') lockable research carrels and twenty-two group study rooms in the library expansion project. A core cluster of carrels created on the second floor provided the bulk of the research space with the remaining carrels on each of the three stack floors. Group study rooms were located on the first floor in the Reference Department, in a second floor reading room, and on the three stack floors.

Study:

Before the construction began, faculty, staff and students began inquiring as to the assignment of carrels and group study rooms. In order to create a policy for the University Libraries, a survey of library literature was conducted which yielded little information on assignable study space policies[1]. Most of the literature addressed design of carrels rather than use and access to the study space. Fifty-two public academic libraries were written, requesting copies of their policies on assignable study

space. The request was for information on two categories of assignable library study space: **Carrels**, which were defined as lockable rooms designed for one person occupancy, and **Group Studies**, which were rooms designed for occupancy by more than one person at a time. The thirty responses received were used to create Cook Memorial Library's policies for research carrels and group study rooms.

The following information serves as both a compilation of policy decisions and a menu for creating use policies for assignable study space. Under each topic, the options are listed and special considerations discussed. By selecting options in each category, a core policies for carrels and group study rooms may be formulated.

RESEARCH CARRELS

Nearly every survey response indicated that the number of carrels available was not sufficient to meet the requests for assignment. Although the demand was great, many respondents indicated that actual use was low. As one respondent indicated, "Although we have a great demand for the faculty and graduate carrels, they never seem to be occupied! I've often wondered if the space would not serve more library users if it were used as open study space (i.e., seating without walls)." As a result, many institutions began assigning more than one person to each carrel

in order to balance the demand for assignment with the level of carrel use and rescinding carrel privileges if the carrel was not used. Carrel registers and cards requiring prompt return to library personnel were used to determine lack of use.

The basic premise that governs decisions regarding the creation of a carrel policy is the philosophy of carrel use. Carrels may be used for research within close proximity to library materials, for faculty or student offices, conference rooms, or for clandestine romance rendezvous! Libraries with a stated philosophy governing carrel use must then determine appropriate control in policy construction without impeding the efforts of the carrel user.

ELIGIBILITY: The study revealed that a majority of carrels were assigned to faculty, as faculty tenure and promotion requirements included research activities. Several policies described specific categories of faculty and students (those conducting research, for example) who were eligible for a carrel assignment. The following options were given in the policies studied:

- Faculty: Categories for inclusion
  - All faculty (including University Administration)
  - Faculty conducting research
  - Teaching faculty
  - Non tenured faculty
  - Faculty and administration

Full time faculty

Visiting faculty

Emeritus faculty

- University Staff

  All staff

  Administrative staff

- Students

  All graduate students

  Graduate students writing theses or dissertations

  Honors students

  All Undergraduate students

- Others

  Persons under contract with University for special research projects

  Retired faculty

  Government agency personnel with University relationship

  Community college/faculty from other colleges

- PRIORITIES OF ELIGIBLE GROUPS

As indicated by those submitting information on policies, it is important to concisely define those categories eligible for

carrel assignment. If not accomplished, groups with the greatest need for a carrel may not receive carrel assignments. The groups with eligibility have a significant impact on how the carrels are used. The library is providing office/conference space at the expense of competing demands (group study, staff work areas, collection space). Since only one person may use the carrel at a time, the use of specified library space is dictated by one individual rather than the entire library constituency. Although demand for carrel assignment is great, there must be a balance between reserved space and space available to all library users.

Of even greater importance than eligibility is the aspect of priority for use. If those conducting library research are not given a higher priority, then how is the "research" gauged through a policy? There are several possible responses when faced with this dilemma:

#1 Make no judgements and assign no priorities to specific use of the carrel.

#2 Reserve a percentage of carrels for specific groups eligible for assignment.

#3 Require evidence from the carrel applicant's supervisor as to applicants need for assignment.

Of the three listed (and there are many more scenarios), the most appropriate response is probably #1, make no judgements. There will be fewer skirmishes regarding the assignments, and you will be less likely to lose your job over this choice. Response #2 will result in an artificial assignment process, and #3 places unnecessary work on those eligible for carrel assignment.

LENGTH OF ASSIGNMENT: A unique aspect of the carrel policies was in the length of assignment. Some institutions provided indefinite assignment of carrels to faculty, which would seem to provide the faculty member a permanent office in the library. Others provided a combination of long term, short term, and daily assignment. Most carrel policies provided either a calendar year or an academic year assignment. Choices were:

- Calendar year
- Academic year
- Two concurrent semesters
- One semester
- a combination of assignments based on eligibility status (faculty, student, etc.)
- short term; less than one month
- not assigned; all carrels checked out for use on a daily basis at circulation desk

There are advantages and disadvantages to each of the assignment lengths listed, and the policy should seek to best meet the needs of the carrel user. Frequent reassignment of carrels is more work for the individual assigning them, however more eligible applicants will receive a carrel assignment more quickly with brief assignment periods (i.e. a higher turnover rate). Another disadvantage of short assignment periods is that the carrel user may not have enough time to complete research during the assignment period.

RENEWAL: With any of the length of assignment choices, libraries offered anywhere from one renewal of assignment to unlimited renewals. Renewal policies varied with the library's philosophy of carrel use and the demand for carrels.

- no renewals
- one renewal
- more than one renewal
- unlimited renewals

Carrel renewal relates to the basic philosophy of carrel use. If the carrel is to provide close proximity to library materials for research purposes, then fewer renewals would be necessary. Faculty with ongoing research demands would find renewal limits artificial and unreasonable.

METHOD OF APPLICATION: Most policies assigned carrels on a first-come, first-served basis. Most libraries accepted applications (either throughout the year or during certain periods of the year) and filled carrel requests based upon the date of application. Applications were retained, so that any carrel vacated could be easily filled. Many application forms provided an opportunity to specify a preferred carrel location in the library.

- first-come, first-served
- lottery system
- Other considerations:
  - priority groups
  - specific registration period
  - applications accepted any time
  - reapply each semester
  - keep waiting list
  - preferred carrel location

In the method of application, as with many aspects of the policy, the amount of work required for those eligible for assignment should be kept to a minimum. Reapplication and specific registration periods are more cumbersome for eligible carrel applicants, and the administrator of the policy may become responsible for regularly communicating the application procedures and restrictions to potential applicants.

Another consideration in the method of application relates to the priority level of applicant groups (see Eligibility). Priority levels can complicate the assignment of carrels unless applications received by a date prior to a regular assignment period are grouped by priority and assigned by date of application.

ADMINISTRATION OF CARREL ASSIGNMENT: The administration of the policy regarding assignment was dependent on the control of library space. Most frequently, assignment of carrels was accomplished by library personnel. In one response, the number of carrels were divided by colleges and the deans of each college assigned carrels.

- Head of Circulation
- Head of User/Public Services
- Administrative Office Manager
- Head of the Library
- Deans of Colleges

Whatever the method of assignment, the administration must be fair and executed as outlined in the carrel policy. Libraries either unwilling or unable to assume responsibility for carrel assignment could run the risk of losing control over its space. The temptation to create permanently assigned faculty offices in the library opens a Pandora's box of issues: security of library

materials, building access after library hours, and decreased flexibility for future use of carrel space for collections, general public use, or staff use.

FEES: Most institutions charged a refundable deposit for keys and did not require the carrel holder to pay for use of the carrel. One library began charging users fees to limit the number of applications received.

- use charge -- $10.00
- one time application charge
- no charge
- refundable key deposit ($1.00 to $30.00)
- key replacement assessment ($1.00 to $30.00)

The institution of fees for use of assignable library space is also based upon the position of the institution regarding the use of its services. The charging of fees for carrel use could be challenged by those claiming that the library is to provide open access to its facility.

LIBRARY MATERIALS HELD IN CARRELS: Some libraries provided check out of periodicals and reference books to carrels for abbreviated loan periods. One respondent whose library did not allow carrel check out speculated that many "missing items" may have been

located in carrels, but frequent carrel checks were difficult to accomplish with limited staffing.

- check out to individuals only
- check out to individuals and carrels

Providing check out to carrels provides the library users and staff with information regarding the carrel holder's use of items in an online catalog/circulation environment. In order for the carrel holder to take advantage of carrel checkout, it must be a short trip from the stacks to the carrel via the circulation desk.

GROUP STUDY ROOMS

At the heart of a policy for group study are basic premises of library use. What is the purpose of the group study room? Is the room to be used as a classroom, and may classes regularly meet in group study rooms? Is the group study room used to allow two or more students to converse regarding the last weekend or classroom assignments? Can fraternity or sorority groups use group studies for required "study hall?"

The policies for group study rooms most often are based upon the staffing available to enforce policies established. Libraries with few staff members should seek to create a policy that does not burden the staff in its execution. If the library seeks to enforce a policy requiring reservations and checkout of keys, the current staff must be able to assume responsibility for the resulting procedures that add to higher priority library duties.

ELIGIBILITY: If the study room is solely used to contain noise, then anyone that can make noise should be eligible to use the room. People using typewriters, blind students who have people reading aloud for them, high school students working en masse on term paper assignments, and six year old visitors who have not learned to read silently are all eligible. It seems that there would never be enough "noise closets" available to prevent librarians from asking library users to be quiet.

- faculty
- staff
- students
- regularly assigned classes
- non-university students
- minimum number of people in carrel unless needed

The nature of demand for group study space may dictate who uses the room. Non-university students or personnel may be allowed to use a room as long as it is not needed by a University student or faculty member.

LENGTH OF ASSIGNMENT: The number of hours a group study room may be occupied varied from no specified number to four hours per day.

- specified number of hours
- no specified number of hours

Limits on usage provide greater control, but also create a greater work load on the staff to enforce. If time limits on use cannot be easily enforced, then they should not be formulated.

USE: Librarians offered many comments regarding the use of group study rooms. Some cautioned that all rooms should be able to be visually monitored from a service desk, and others indicated that

the lights or locks should not be controllable from inside the room. Librarians recommended that the doors remain locked when not in use and sign up sheets placed on the doors to each group study room.

- rooms locked at all times
- rooms unlocked at all times (make sure the doors cannot be locked from the inside)
- reservations accepted
- no reservations accepted
- sign up sheets on doors; user enforcement of reservations
- size of group

The method used for occupancy of group study rooms is also contingent on knowledge of the library's clientele. Urban academic libraries have different concerns from institutions in rural settings. As those libraries surveyed were public institutions, building access considerations may determine whether the rooms are kept locked.

Once again, the acceptance of reservations at a service desk requires staff time to execute. If rooms are locked, staff time is used to check in and out the keys. If security is not an issue, then sign up sheets on the doors of rooms may be a satisfactory alternative.

The size of groups wanting to use the rooms may be a consideration. Signs indicating room capacity should be clearly displayed, and larger groups have priority over small groups.

CONTROL: Depending on the locations of group study rooms, control was exercised in varying degrees. Many libraries charged out keys on the circulation system at the circulation desk. The keys were then due at a specific time and fines could be levied for not returning the keys when due.

- no control
- Centralized: all keys checked out at circulation on ID
- Decentralized: keys checked out through closest service desk

In departments where group study rooms are located, the decentralized aspect seems most successful. Librarians can then ask groups to move into the group studies, and be aware of what library materials the groups will be using in the room.

ADMINISTERED: The more concise the policy, the lower level of expertise is needed to effectively execute the policy. Most libraries used the Circulation Desk personnel to provide service for group study rooms, and the Head of the Department to deal with problems regarding group study room use.

- by Administrative Office
- by Director of Public Services
- by Head of Circulation
- by units with group study rooms

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Who monitors the activities in group study rooms where no staff are in close proximity? Supervision of these rooms (which should be kept locked when not in use) may be carried out by stack maintenance. The responsibility for these rooms should be clearly defined.

CONCLUSIONS: Regulations: Regulations for use of both carrels and group study rooms should be posted in each room. Applications for carrel use should include the carrel use policy and regulations with a place for signature of the applicant. Assignable study space use offers challenges and opportunities to provide. Carefully planned policies are important, and it is vital to seek approval for policies by faculty, students, and administration before implementation.

1. Sypers-Duran, Peter. "Faculty Studies: A Survey of their Use in Selected Libraries." **College and Research Libraries** 29 (January 1968): 55-61.